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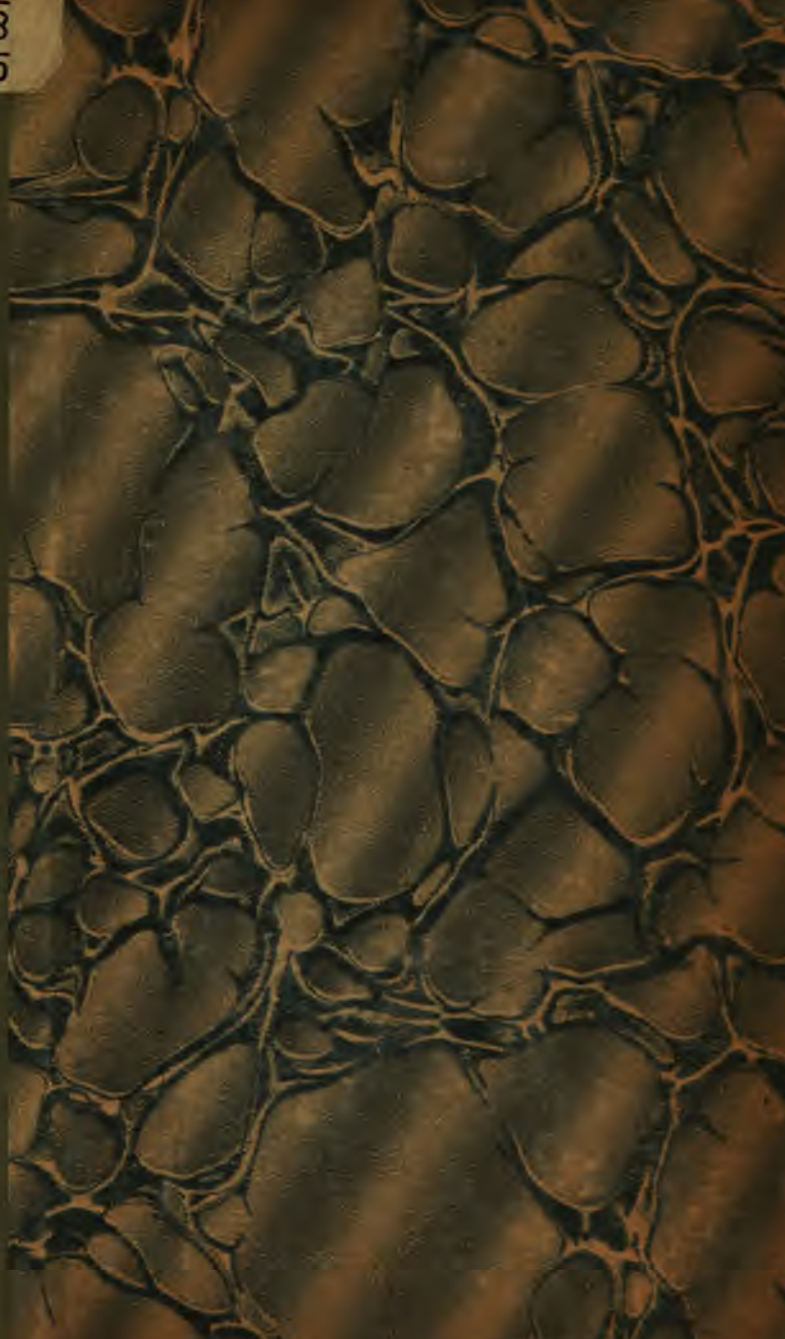
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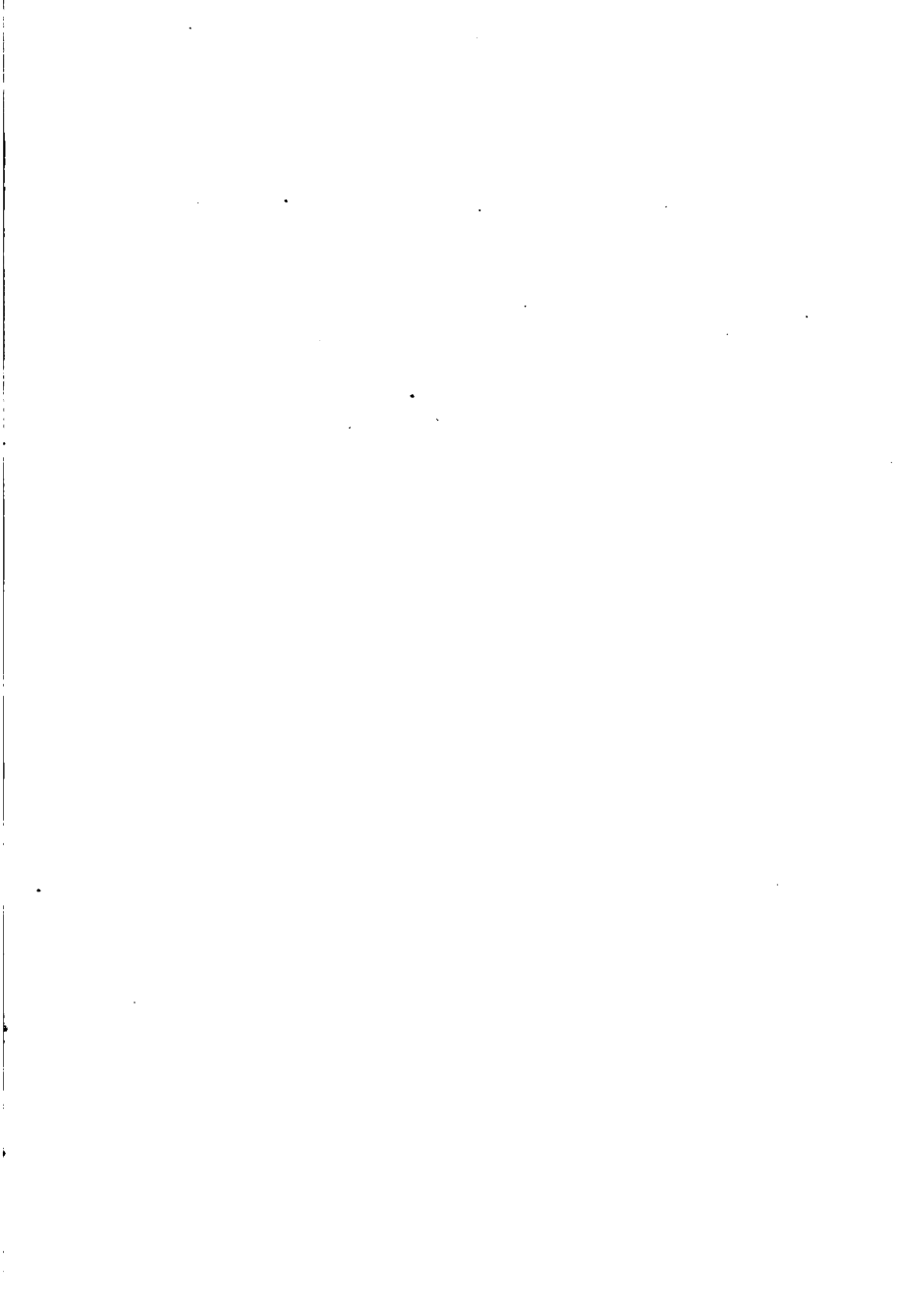
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Our Ancestors

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By JEANNE MAIRET

(MADAME CHARLES BIGOT)



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OUR ANCESTORS

ACT I

SCENE I

PERSONAGES

HUGH PRESTON	ARABELLA STEWART
SIR MERVYN WOODRUFF	RUTH CAMERON
MR. AMOS STEWART	PEGGIE STEWART
MRS. DUMPTON	

A much-encumbered and vast loft in the country house of Mr. Amos Stewart. Armor, costumes, draperies tumbled together. A lay figure, dressed in old-time clothes, stands in a corner. Hugh Preston discovered painting. He wears a hat and plume of the Charles I period, and looks in a mirror as he works. Whistles softly to himself: "Charlie is my darling . . ."

Hugh. It is an extraordinary fact, but all the ancestors of Mr. Amos Stewart bear an extraordinary like-

ness to . . . their painter. In these pictures, whether they are signed Holbein, Van-Dyck or Velasquez, the likeness will pop out, even when I change the shape of the nose or the color of the eyes. A real family likeness which begins at the Crusades and ends . . . well, I suppose it must end when I attack Amos Stewart, Esq., himself. Rather a pity, as I consider my present model far better looking than Amos. (Throws himself back in his chair.) Two months of solitary confinement up in this garret. Two months without speaking to any human being except my female jailor, when she brings me my prison food. No outsider is to guess that an ancestry-factory has been established in this modern castle, where the dungeons are at the top of the house, instead of being underground, and where everything seems somehow turned topsy-turvy. Lugubrious silence reigned supreme and I might have thought myself in another planet until yesterday, when I certainly heard some bustle, even the sound of female voices, by no means belonging to that developed charmer, the venerable Mrs. Dumpton. (He listens.) A laugh! . . . Somebody has laughed in this abode of misery—and it is a young laugh. (Puts down his palette, throws off his hat, draws a stool near the window, which is a high one, and cranes his neck so as to catch a glimpse of the outside world.)

SCENE II.

Enter Mrs. Dumpton, carrying a tray. Behind her, on tiptoe, comes Peggie. As the housekeeper turns to shut the door, Peggie slips in quickly and hides behind the lay figure.

Mrs. Dumpton. (Looks around for Hugh Preston, then spies him on the stool.) Lord'a'mercy, sir, what air you doin' up there? You'll surely topple over if you go on peering like that—and you're making signs, too! 'Pon my word! Them's pretty manners for a gentleman, who was to keep 'nonymous, as people who write books and don't sign 'em is called.

Hugh. I have had enough of being anonymous, worthy Dame Dumpton. I'm going to strike, and you may tell your master so, if you like. I agreed to paint him a lot of ancestors at the lowest possible rates; but I did not agree to be driven into raving madness by solitary confinement. Two months without seeing a human countenance . . .

Mrs. D. And what do you call mine, if you please? You might keep a civil tongue in your head!

Hugh. I beg your pardon, worthy dowager.

Mrs. D. I'm Mrs. Dumpton, if you don't mind. I won't be called names, no, not by no means!

Hugh. If you only knew that, driven to desperation, I had once—only once—been on the verge of kissing you, revered dame!

Mrs. D. (Bridling up.) And you would not have

been so much to be pitied, neither, let me tell you, young man!

Hugh. I resisted the evil temptation . . . Let us see what you have brought me to-day. Something good, hey?

Mrs. D. You can't say that I starve you, anyhow. Master said you was to be fed up, so that you might work hard. (Puts the things down, placing the dessert on another table.)

Hugh. That looks rather appetizing. I have been expecting to turn from my food with disgust, because of my loneliness and misery. But, so far, I have not.

Mrs. D. As to that! . . . Now, what shall I give you for your dinner . . . But there'll be lots anyway, since the family . . . Drat my tongue . . . I was to say nothing about it!

Hugh. As though I had no ears and no eyes! Do you think that I took these voices—that laugh—those tripping steps for yours, worthy Dumpton? Has the great Amos come with his womenfolk?

Mrs. D. No, he hasn't. But he's expected. If I remain another moment I shall let it all out. You're to lock the door after me and let nobody else come in. Them's the orders.

Hugh (Beginning to eat with good appetite.) All right, mother.

Mrs. D. I shall be back for the tray in an hour. Now let me hear you lock the door. (Exit. *Hugh* follows her and locks the door, then returns to his place and falls to heartily. Meanwhile, *Peggie*, who has peeped out several times during the fore-

going scene, comes forward, half-shy, half-bold. She is biting a big red apple.)

Peggie. How are you, Mister Painter?

Hugh. (Letting his knife and fork fall in his amazement.) The Dickens! . . . How did you get here?

Peg. Through the window—flew in, you know, in the shape of a wee, sweet little bird. Only I left my wings in the cloak room. Have a bite? (Offers her apple.)

Hugh. Thanks! I have not yet got to the dessert. Are you a daughter of Mr. Amos Stewart?

Peg. You bet your little boots! The youngest. My name is Margaret, only they call me Peggie for short, and because it sounds infantile. Just as they make me wear my frocks up to the knee. You know, Mr. . . . Mr. . . . what's your name? I told you mine.

Hugh. Hugh Preston, at your service, Miss Peggie.

Peg. (Taking another bite.) I was going to say that, as long as Arabella isn't married, I shall be kept in very short skirts. Even if I were eighteen, they'd be cut off ever so high up and my hair dressed with pink or blue flyers. And I'm fourteen; in four years I shall really be eighteen.

Hugh. Go to the top of the class, Pupil Peggie.

Peg. You needn't poke fun at me! Don't you think it's wrong, almost wicked for elder sisters not to marry and . . . clear the decks for the others? Now, Arabella is twenty-two . . . Isn't that awfully old? When I am twenty-two I shall have been mar-

ried at least two years, perhaps four . . . perhaps . . .

Hugh. Perhaps six. I could easily picture you a bride . . . a beautiful bride at sixteen.

Peg. (Radiant.) Could you, now? Oh, I like you, Mr. Hugh Preston, ever, ever so much. Nobody, so far, has ever told me that I should be married at sixteen.

Hugh. I hope you'll invite me to the wedding.

Peg. Sure! (Looks longingly at the luncheon.) I say . . . You won't mind if I tell you that I'm . . . I'm just starving . . . and it does look so good and picknicky, so much nicer than a regular meal, with lots of dishes served with knives and forks and things, all put just so, and a man behind your chair who looks at every morsel you eat. I'm always—always—hungry, and I often steal things from the butler's pantry. You won't tell on me?

Hugh. (Rising with stately politeness.) Will you do me the great honor, Miss Margaret Stewart, of sharing my humble repast?

Peg. Won't I, though! (Puts a chair opposite his and sits down.) Isn't this a lark, though! Now, we might almost play at being married, couldn't we? Only that you are a bit old. I say, there is but one plate, one glass, one everything. How mean of Mrs. Dumpton. She ought to have foreseen that you might have a guest. I'll take the bread plate, so—that will be all right. A little broiled chicken—Not so very little, either—that's good; only you must keep a little for yourself.

Hugh. But how are you going to eat it? . . . Ah.

here is a dessert fork. (Goes to the other table and takes various articles which he hands her.)

Peg. And the glass?. . . Wait a bit. (Rushes off until she finds a dressing-room, and comes back triumphantly with a mug.) That must do for you. I'll take the glass.

Hugh. Certainly. Only . . .

Peg. Oh! never mind. I don't. (Drinks.) Now, isn't this comfy and cozy? Oh! how good it all tastes. Much better than my old apple. (Throws it out of the window.) I hope it'll fall on Mother Dumpton's head. She is such a poke. You mustn't tell. I didn't really fly into the room. I saw the old thing puffing up the stairs (imitates her and swells out her cheeks), carrying that heavy tray with all the good things on it, and, naturally, it made me curious. Wouldn't it you?

Hugh. Most undoubtedly.

Peg. We had already got a notion that something mysterious was going on here, and I made up my mind to find out what it was. So I slipped my shoes off and followed the Dumpton.

Hugh. Like a small boat attached to a schooner.

Peg. The schooner had enough to do to waddle along. When she turned one way, I turned the other. When she opened the door, I hid behind a pillar; when she sailed in, puffing more than ever, I slipped by and hid behind that lady there, who did not mind it one bit. I heard all you said . . . about kissing her and all . . .

Hugh. You did, did you!

Peg. Don't be afraid. I won't blab. Only, it was so

funny to think of you . . . I almost exploded, you know. If I had, I should have been sent out—and we should not have had this nice little picnic—and what a pity that would have been!

Hugh. I should think so.

Peg. (Looking at the dish.) Isn't there just a little bone left? . . . Oh! thanks. But I am afraid I am depriving you.

Hugh. (A little ruefully.) Not in the least. (Takes the dish and puts his bread in the gravy, for lack of anything else). So you and the other ladies have come to the castle for the Summer: your mother, your sister, and? . . . (He stops inquiringly.)

Peg. (Eating all the while.) . . . And Ruth Cameron. Nice girl, Ruth Cameron, ever so much nicer than Bella. Only she insists on making me say my French verbs every day. I hate French verbs, don't you? How can you keep *avoir* out of *être*, or *être* out of *avoir*? I can't. They will mix somehow. Then there's the English beau, Sir Mervyn Woodruff. He's followed us all the way from England. We met him at a swell house party, where there were ever so many great names—names one finds in history, you know . . . and where people at luncheon helped themselves from a sideboard; no servants allowed. Mother said she thought it wasn't quite a lady's duty to help herself off a sideboard: I found it rather fun, because I just heaped my plate; people didn't seem to mind what you did.

Hugh. So the Englishman followed in the wake of the dollars?

Peg. Of course. But he does not seem to make much

headway. Arabella said to Ruth—you know they were at school together and great chums; it was Bella forced Ruth to travel with her—"Ruth, darling, I will only marry a man who loves me for myself" . . . I heard her. I hear everything that is not intended for me, and then I tease . . . I tease . . . until life becomes a burden. I turn up my eyes—so—and I say: "Bella, dear, do you think the dogs and cats and birds love you for yourself, or for what you give them to eat?" Isn't it sentimental rot? I shouldn't care what I was married for, so that I got a husband of some sort. After all, it wouldn't be so bad to be Lady Woodruff, now would it?

Hugh. Some dessert, my practical little friend?

Peg. As much as possible. Let's share and share alike. (Cuts the pie in two and divides the fruit.) But I really fear that I had more than my share of that chicken. Are you very hungry still?

Hugh. Not ravenously so. I can make up for my fasting at dinner time. Will you allow me to go on with my work? My task is a quarter of an ancestor a day. I have got up to Charles I.'s time. That's doing pretty well, I take it. (Puts on the hat and takes up his brushes, still nibbling at the pie.)

Peg. How funny you look with your cutaway coat and that feathered hat! What on earth do you mean about a quarter of an ancestor a day? Whose ancestors are they?

Hugh. Yours, Miss Margaret Stewart.

Peg. (Bent with laughter.) Father's grandfather

was a bricklayer who came from the old country . . .

Hugh. Error, error. I can prove it by my painting. I have photographs from the time of the Crusaders . . . (A knock at the door.) I say . . . don't laugh so. Keep still. I am not allowed to see anyone. (Louder and more imperious knocking. A voice calls, "Open, open at once—or I shall have the door broken in.")

Peg. (In a stage whisper.) That's Bella. And isn't she in a pretty rage!

Hugh. (Very loud.) I regret exceedingly, but Mr. Stewart's orders are peremptory. I am not to open. I am not to show myself. I am a prisoner on parole, and am only allowed to take some exercise at night, when everybody is asleep.

Bella. (From the outside.) I am Mr. Stewart's daughter. In his absence I command. Open.

Hugh. Then, Miss Stewart, you take it all upon yourself. I yield to superior force. (Opens the door.)

SCENE III.

Arabella, Ruth, Sir Mervyn Woodruff. Peggie hides behind the lay figure.

Bella. (Looking with amazement at the painter.) What is the meaning of all this . . . of this masquerading . . . of all this trumpery? (Points to

the costumes, etc., and catches a glimpse of her little sister.) Peggie . . . you here? How dare you be shut up with . . . with a stranger, you naughty, shameless child! You ought to be whipped!

Peg. (To Hugh.) Didn't I tell you she treated me like a baby, so that people shouldn't guess how awfully old she is? Now, don't fly into one of your tantrums, Bella, what's the use? Sir Mervyn might get scared and run away. Then you'd discover that you adored him.

Sir M. Oh! . . . Ah! . . . I'll run away in that case.

Peg. I'll present, you, Bella. This is my friend, Mr. Hugh Preston. He's painting our ancestors—not the bricklayer—but those of the Crusades. He has photographs of them—so that's proof enough, isn't it? He paints a quarter of one a day, and father gets them dirt cheap. I heard Mr. Preston say so to the housekeeper . . . so now!

Bella. (Haughtily.) Will you explain the meaning of all this, Mr. . . . Mr. . . .

Peg. (Cheerfully.) Mr. Hugh Preston. You never can catch names, Bella. It is an infirmity of age. But I must go on with my presentations. Miss Ruth Cameron . . .

Hugh. The lady of the French verbs? An admirable governess, I am sure.

Peg. (A little disconcerted.) Governess? . . . Well, yes, if you like. Sir Mervyn Woodruff.

Hugh. (Holding out his hand.) Glad to make your acquaintance, Sir Mervyn. I wish you'd sit to me for one of the fearless warriors of old—for one who is afraid . . . of nothing.

Sir M. Charmed, I'm sure.

Hugh. (Playing the host.) Pray be seated. There are not many chairs, but packing cases are good substitutes.

Bella. Thanks. We shall not intrude long upon your privacy, and I shall take my little sister away with me. But first you must explain.

Hugh. (Sweetly.) With the greatest pleasure. I was studying painting in Paris, and my funds had run very low; artists' funds somehow have a way of running low. I had gone to a comrade's studio, when your father, Mr. Amos Stewart, walked in. He was not embarrassed, Americans are never embarrassed; but he was a little at a loss. He said in a loud voice—people who do not know the language of the country always yell—why, I cannot tell: "Pâ-â-ley-vous English?" At which my friend, who is a very modest man, not at all given to boasting, replied: "A few . . ."

Ruth. (Laughing.) They both needed my lessons, I think.

Hugh. I served as interpreter, and all went on smoothly. Mr. Stewart had built this very fine castle, which contains a long picture gallery. But what is a picture gallery without pictures, and a castle, copied from the Château de Blois, without ancestral portraits? Mr. Stewart wanted to order them wholesale, so much a gross, and offered the job, with board and lodging. My friend was . . . well, shall I say disconcerted? . . . and refused. He came to the conclusion that his knowledge of English was

really insufficient, and the price offered equally so. He urged me to take his place. I wanted to return to America—so the bargain was soon concluded. Mr. Stewart understood the necessity of stage properties, and I ordered enough to stride over more than six centuries . . . as you can see.

Sir M. Any difficulty at the Custom House?

Hugh. My lay-figure nearly caused me to be sent back like an unsatisfactory emigrant. It was in a long box and looked most suspicious. I had to explain that it was my deceased wife, brought over for interment. Then I was allowed to pass on.

Bella. And you have been here? . . .

Hugh. Just two months. I have scrambled up to the Stuart days . . . to your direct ancestor.

Bella. (Proudly.) My father is his own ancestor. We need no trumpery make-believes in our family.

Hugh. That was not his way of thinking.

Ruth. Remember, dear, that you have often regretted not belonging to the Colonial Dames or to the Daughters of the Revolution. I know families whose great occupation is the painful erection of their family tree.

Peg. So do I . . . for I am a good listener. Mrs. Allard Smith had almost succeeded and had dug out an ancestor who had served under Washington. Only she discovered just in time that he had been hanged for stealing.

Bella. Can't you hold your tongue for ten minutes? . . . Now, Mr. Preston, pray let us talk over this matter a little seriously.

Hugh. No one is more serious than I am in business

—and this job of mine has not much to do with art, as I need not tell you, Miss Stewart.

Bella. How can you pretend to make us descend from the Stuarts? In the first place, the name is written differently: *S-t-e-w-a-r-t*.

Hugh. All the greater proof of authenticity. The forefather of the reigning family of the Stuarts was called Fitzflaad and crossed over to England with William the Conquerer.

Ruth. Naturally. That enterprising duke must have been followed by the entire population of Normandy.

Peg. He beats the Mayflower, doesn't he, now?

Hugh. He became steward of Scotland under David I. and his family, succeeding to the office, took the name of it.

Peg. They were butlers in the family, were they?

Hugh. Not exactly. But it came to the same thing. Even to pull on royal stockings confers dignity. It was the French, always friendly to the Scotch, who changed the name to Stuart. When Robert Bruce died, leaving only one daughter, she married a Stuart and her son became king.

Peg. Isn't he learned, I say!

Hugh. Encyclopedic knowledge, Miss Peggie. My English and Scottish history had grown somewhat rusty, so I brushed it up in honor of my new job. I confess that I lingered a little over the Crusaders, when some of your ancestors distinguished themselves. I do not make them of royal descent, Miss Stewart. I am discreet. You come of a lateral branch. These adventurous spirits followed Richard, having somehow wandered over the border. The armor is con-

venient. Only the eyes show, and I have made them as fierce as possible. Later on, as you see (turns around a number of canvases), I had to use myself as model. I apologize for my boldness, but really, painting entirely from imagination is a little unsatisfactory.

Peg. What a lot of Preston portraits! I don't complain, for one. I shall always remember that I devoured most of the luncheon prepared for the painter of the numberless Stuarts, all the way from David I. to Charles. We were a good-looking set in those days.

Hugh. (Modestly.) Oh! I endeavored to change the type as much as possible.

Ruth. Your success in that particular, Mr. Preston, has been less remarkable than in making a most amusing series. And I see that they are all signed.

Hugh. Yes. Mr. Stewart was very particular about that, and he wished for big names. Of course, I did not object. Only he suggested that they should all be signed Van Dyck. That seemed to me, chronologically speaking, rather difficult, so I varied the signatures.

Sir M. But how are you going to make all this fresh paint look old?

Hugh. Nothing easier. Picture dealers always do it, especially when they send a lot of old masters to America. Here, this one is dry. (He takes a portrait and rubs it vigorously on the dusty floor.) There, now! . . . You see that it is not complicated. (Exhibits a very black painting.)

Bella. I see nothing but men among your masterpieces.

Surely some of these heroes must have been married.

Sir M. Else they were scarcely heroes.

Bella. Is that an epigram, Sir Mervyn?

Sir M. I meant it as a compliment.

Ruth. It can be taken both ways.

Hugh. Ah! Miss Stewart, there you have put your finger on my chief perplexity. I am terribly wanting in imagination. I need models. You really would not have wished Mrs. Dumpton's charms to be made immortal as the one type of Stewart beauty!

Bella. Heaven forbid!

Hugh. If . . . if . . . but I hardly dare to formulate so audacious a wish . . .

Bella. (Smiling.) It seems to me, Mr. Preston, that timidity is scarcely your predominant characteristic.

Hugh. Then let me at least have the benefit of my shamelessness. If you and Miss Cameron . . . and even my little friend, Miss Peggie, would only sit to me . . . then indeed would your gallery of old masters attract visitors!

Bella. (Hesitating.) Really . . . it seems rather difficult. We have many engagements. Then my father, who was so careful to hide his secret, would be ill-pleased. My mother . . .

Peg. As to mother, you know as well as I do, Bella, that as long as she can nurse her sick headaches on a sofa, with a couple of new novels on her table and no one to bother her, she will ask for nothing more. You twist father around your little finger. There! . . . Of course, Mr. Preston, we shall all be delighted to sit to you and wear all these pretty rags.

Begin with me. Only don't—please don't—paint me as a little girl!

Hugh. You shall be a dowager, with a big Elizabethan ruff and a poodle dog.

Peg. And wrinkles—mind you put in some wrinkles.

Bella. What do you say, Ruth?

Ruth. That we all accept, of course. Your guests do not come for several weeks. We have nothing in the world to do, and it will be great fun to resuscitate history, thanks to Mr. Preston.

Hugh. I am so grateful . . . Let us begin at once. I have not yet quite made up my mind as to how I shall bring your ancestors over to America. You must help me.

Peg. There is the bricklayer . . .

Bella. (Severely.) Peggie!

Hugh. We shall leave him in the background, Miss Margaret. Of course, in some way or other, we must introduce Lady Arabella Stuart; that is a foregone conclusion.

Bella. Was she not of royal blood?

Hugh. She was only the daughter of Charles Stuart, Earl of Lennox, and cousin to the king.

Peg. Doesn't he know a lot! Even Miss Cameron cannot hold a candle to him.

Ruth. I have no such high pretensions.

Bella. Peggie, if you do not keep quiet, I shall send you downstairs . . . I am interested in my namesake. What became of her? I have quite forgotten. Didn't Queen Elizabeth put her to death?

Hugh. Arabella had some claim to the English throne, and so the Queen forbade her to marry. There

were enough Stuarts in her way as it was. But Arabella fell in love with a gallant gentleman, William Seymour, and married him secretly. Naturally, the secret was ill-kept. Seymour was sent to the Tower, and she became the prisoner of the Bishop of Durham. She escaped and embarked for France. Her husband also got out of the Tower, but he was unable to reach his wife; her vessel was captured, and she, in her turn, was sent to the Tower, where, five years later, she died, raving mad.

Bella. How tragic! I think her costume might be becoming to me. If we cannot claim Arabella as our ancestress . . .

Hugh. Especially as she left no children . . .

Bella. Exactly. I might personate some relative, attached to her evil fortunes . . . and wearing her cast-off finery.

Hugh. That would be the very thing. But there is another interesting young woman whom I should wish you to personate.

Peg. That's it! You'll see that all the fine parts will be given to her. You and I, Miss Ruth, will be the wallflowers.

Ruth. I am resigned to my sad fate, Peggie. What is that other romance, Mr. Preston?

Hugh. That of a pretender. A youth named Perkin Warbeck personated the Duke of York, supposed to have escaped from the Tower and from the clutches of his wicked uncle, Richard III. The King of France, Charles VIII., and Margaret of Burgundy, took up the cause of the pretender; so did James IV. of Scotland. He even gave the supposed Duke

of York a cousin of his in marriage. Now, I am intimately persuaded that your branch of the Stuarts comes from that lovely person . . . whom I shall paint from you, Miss Stewart, if you will condescend to sit for me.

Sir M. The costume will also be very becoming. I know something about it. We possess a portrait of this very lady at Woodruff Castle. I am delighted to think that we are related.

Peg. What fun! . . . What became of that sweet youth, do tell me, Mr. Preston!

Hugh. You had better apply to Miss Cameron, who, I am sure, is better able to edify you than I could be . . . in spite of the Encyclopedia.

Ruth. If I remember right, Perkin Warbeck was abandoned by his royal protectors when they found that he could be of no further use to them, and he was finally sent to the block.

Hugh. But now, what about the emigration to America?

Sir M. It might take place under Elizabeth, I should say. A beautiful relative accompanied Mary Stuart to England, and after the wicked murder of that unfortunate—if not spotless—Queen, fled to the Colonies.

Hugh. That would be plausible, Sir Mervyn. But what about my lovely Charles I. hat and plume? I cannot sacrifice them. Let us say that after the execution of Mary Stuart the family fell into disgrace, and when Charles I. in his turn lost his head—and no longer needed a hat—the Stewarts emigrated. How would that do?

OUR ANCESTORS

Bella. Perfect. I begin to feel quite at home with our ancestors.

Hugh. Then Miss Cameron would kindly put on the Puritan costume. It would suit her to perfection.

Peg. And whom shall I represent? I won't be left out in the cold like that!

Bella. You shall be one of the Salem witches; you would not have to complain of the cold then . . .

Hugh. When shall we begin? If you knew how tired I am of contemplating my own face!

Bella. At once . . . that is as soon as the costumes are ready.

Hugh. You will find all you need in these trunks. Six centuries might suffice even for American nobility.

Bella. If we can't go further, I suppose so.

Peg. There are Adam and Eve. I don't see them in your collection, Mr. Preston.

Hugh. The fashions of the day embarrassed me. Otherwise . . . (While the women are examining the costumes a knock at the door is heard, and Mrs. Dumpton calls out, "Open the door, Mr. Preston!")

SCENE IV.

The same, Mrs. Dumpton.

Hugh. Come in, fair dame. (Throws open the door.)

Mrs. D. Oh! my stars and little bits of garters! Here's a pretty kettle of fish!

Bella. I take it all upon my own shoulders, Mrs. Dumpton. I forced Mr. Preston to let us in.

Peg. But I was the first to break the law and you were complice. You let me in, Mrs. Dumpton.

Mrs. D. I . . . The impudence of it!

Peg. I slid in behind you, in your shadow; there was plenty of room.

Mrs. D. And I who only came in for the tray!

Peg. You won't find much left on it. I never saw a man with such an appetite.

Mrs. D. For sure . . . You shall have a whole chicken next time. Master said you were not to be starved . . .

Bella. He shall not. Henceforth Mr. Preston is to be my guest and have his place at our table.

Mrs. D. And your father, Miss Arabella? . . . What will he say to all these fine doings? It's as much as my place is worth.

Bella. I shall explain everything myself to my father.

Mrs. D. Then you can do so at once. He came up unexpectedly from New York, and his first question was about his painter man. He said he'd follow me up . . . and I hear his step. 'Tain't my fault, anyhow.

Peg. Now for a storm, or my name isn't Peggie Stewart!

Bella. (Very dignified.) My father is sure to understand my conduct in this matter, which touches me quite as much as it does him. If he can endure to see all his male ancestors look like . . . like an outsider, I wish my friends to see something of me in Lady Arabella's relative—and in all the others.

SCENE V.

The same. Mr. Amos Stewart.

Mr. S. (Stands at the open door in amazement.)

What is the meaning of all this noise and confusion?

I gave strict orders . . .

Mrs. D. 'Tain't my fault, sir; ask Miss Arabella.

Bella. Glad to see you, father, especially as I have to explain my conduct—of which you will be sure to approve. I soon found that we had an unexpected guest . . . in our garret. Of course, I had to find out who it was. I must do Mr. Preston the justice to say that he only opened the door when I threatened to have it battered in. He has just introduced us to a number of ancestors, called into being by your orders, and I have been greatly pleased to make their acquaintance. We begin with the later Crusades . . . naturally. With our importance in the world, we could not do less. But Mr. Preston was much embarrassed with regard to the women of our race. He had no model of female beauty . . . with the exception of Mrs. Dumpton: quantity is not always quality. We are going to sit to him. It is all arranged, and we were just choosing our costumes when you interrupted us. You see, father, there is no further excuse for secrecy, or for the solitary confinement of a very innocent criminal, so I have invited Mr. Preston to be our guest, in every sense of the word. He is to dine with us this evening.

Mr. S. Who bosses this house, you or I?

Bella. (Sweetly.) Each in turn, dear father. Hospitality is especially a feminine virtue, is it not?

Hugh. Let me assure you, Mr. Stewart, that I have no desire to intrude upon your family privacy. If you will permit me, I shall leave by the next train and finish my work—let us say my job—in my New York studio.

Mr. S. Yes—and have all your friends look at the pictures and make fun of Amos Stewart's ancestors? Not much.

Bella. Don't you see, father, how much nicer it will be to keep it all snug and secret among ourselves?

Mr. S. Secret—with half a dozen women in the plot?

Bella. Women interested in a secret know how to hold their tongues. The gallery will be all in order, the pictures hung before the first set of guests arrives.

Mr. Preston works so rapidly!

Hugh. A quarter of an ancestor a day.

Mr. S. I suppose there is no other solution. But I'm thinking that if painting is such quick work, the price you asked . . .

Hugh. Shall I tell these ladies and Sir Mervyn Woodruff what that price is?

Mr. S. No—no—quite useless to bring business questions into society relations. (Growing more amiable and shaking hands with Hugh.) I have not yet made you welcome to my house, Mr. Preston. Glad to see you. Bella is right. Solitary confinement in a garret—even such a garret as this . . .

Hugh. (Interrupting him.) . . . ought to be consid-

ered in the remuneration. I am quite of that opinion.

Mr. S. (Hastily.) That's another matter. Now, I should be glad, like Arabella, to make the acquaintance of our ancestors. Show us all you have done so far. (Takes a chair.)

Hugh. (Taking up a canvas and turning it toward Mr. Stewart.) This, Mr. Stewart, is the first whom I have been able to trace through your rather complicated lineage! Sir Raoul Fitzflaad, who, from Normandy . . .

(The curtain falls on these words.)

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Stage as for Act I., only more tidy, with some furniture, curtains at the windows, etc. Hugh Preston, then (almost immediately) Sir Mervyn Woodruff. Soon after Arabella, in Elizabethan costume, glides in and hides behind the lay figure.

Hugh. (Painting and whistling softly to himself.) Stunning model. If I don't make a good picture of Lady Arabella it will be my fault, not hers. (A knock.) Come in!

Sir M. I don't disturb you?

Hugh. Not in the least. Make yourself at home. Have a cigar?

Sir M. Thanks, awfully. (Smokes and looks at picture.) Fine bit of color, that. I say . . . you couldn't make a copy for me—with the lady's consent, of course?

Hugh. Certainly. But I should think you would prefer a real portrait of such a model to a mere fancy piece. It would look well in your place.

Sir M. (Hesitatingly.) Yes . . . of course . . . only . . . I say, Preston, let us have it out, in a

friendly sort of way, you know. I did hope to have the original to grace my house, but now . . .

Hugh. (Coolly.) And you still hope it, having good reasons for so doing.

Sir M. Not so sure. She's been flirting with you ever since we stormed your prison, and . . . you've been making love to her. I ought to hate you, for you take the shine out of me, and, somehow, I don't. I like you . . .

Hugh. (Heartily.) And I like you, Woodruff, and have done so from the first. Now, let's talk the matter over quietly and sensibly. Miss Stewart has flirted with me, has amused herself, in fact. You see, American girls flirt as ducks swim; it's in the blood and they can't help it. But, between ourselves, it doesn't amount to anything. Seriously, do you think that Miss Stewart, the daughter of a multi-millionaire, would for an instant dream of marrying a poor devil of a painter, who has not even reputation to offer her—only the vague hope of winning it some day or other? . . . Folly, sheer folly!

Sir M. Perhaps, for in many ways she is her father's daughter and knows the value of dollars. But she is also her novel-reading mother's daughter. She is sentimental and wants to be married after some romantic fashion. With me, you see, there's no romance at all; it's cut and dried; it has been seen a thousand times: an international contract—money on one side, birth on the other. If I could have shown myself as a sort of Perkin Warbeck, taking courts and hearts by storm—why, I might have stood some chance. I am a plain country gentleman and

take interest in cattle . . . even in hogs. Nothing romantic in hogs, you know.

Hugh. But you don't take them to market yourself . . . Then, what do you think our so-called American aristocracy comes from? The killing of those interesting animals—or the selling of groceries wholesale. Is that more romantic than being a gentleman farmer?

Sir M. I suppose not. But all Americans are not wholesale grocers. You are an artist, you paint pretty pictures, you have seen life from an interesting and amusing point of view, you can make girls laugh. I never knew how to talk to women, somehow, and they vote me a bore. I vote myself one, I assure you—and it isn't pleasant.

Hugh. You are too modest, by half. You were evidently not born on this side of the ocean.

Sir M. What I should like to make Miss Arabella understand is that if, at first, I did think of her fortune, if the possibility dawned upon me, thanks to it, of rebuilding the old place, which is more to me than life itself—why, that is all forgotten. I now only think of one thing. I love this woman as I could never love another. I think of nothing but her. I dream of nothing but her. She is the life of my life.

Hugh. Have you told her so?

Sir M. I never dared.

Hugh. Then you must dare. Speak to her as you have spoken to me. You will move her as you have interested me.. Since she is far beyond my reach, I have but one wish: that of seeing her the wife of

as true-hearted a gentleman as you. (The two men shake hands heartily. Arabella glides out.)

Sir M. I wish I could do something for you. It would be such a pleasure.

Hugh. (Gaily.) Persuade your English friends that a new Van Dyck is eager to take England by storm. You see, if you are modest, so am I.

Sir M. So . . . really now . . . you are not madly in love with Bella?

Hugh. I might have been. But I held myself in. I tried to remember that I was doing job-painting by the yard for her father. That kept me within bounds. Then, if I was on the verge of being in love with her, I was in the same position with regard to the little governess. There's safety in numbers.

Sir M. Governess? . . . You mean Miss Cameron? She's no governess.

Hugh. Well, perhaps not. But she gives French lessons to Peggie and teaches the school children to sing . . . it comes to the same thing. I know that Miss Stewart is very good to her.

Sir M. (On the point of speaking, checks himself.) Ah! well . . . of course . . . I couldn't say about that.

SCENE II.

The same. Enter Arabella.

Bella. Are you ready for our last sitting, Mr. Preston? You have taken longer over this ancestress than over a dozen ancestors.

Hugh. Would I could persuade you that I needed many more sittings!

Bella. You scarcely need a single one. The portrait is charming, is it not, Sir Mervyn?

Sir M. Painted *con amore*.

Bella. (Pretending not to understand.) You have been two weeks at it.

Hugh. That is, I began it two weeks ago; but when you found sittings too irksome, I resuscitated several cavalier ancestors and a Roundhead, who somehow got into the family. I have now almost finished my task—alas! (Looks at her sentimentally.)

Sir M. (Nervous.) I feel that no real work will be done while I am here. I leave my character in your hands.

Bella. (Sweetly.) We'll take good care of it, and return it . . .

Sir M. In shreds.

Bella. Not at all. Done up in cast iron. Will you kindly tell Ruth that my sitting will be a very short one, and that Mr. Preston also expects to finish the Puritan portrait to-day? The pictures must all be in place before next week, when the house will be full. (Exit Sir Mervyn.)

SCENE III.

Hugh and Arabella.

Bella. (Seated.) Is this the position?

Hugh. Perfect. The head a little more up. Remem-

ber that you are a very haughty lady—on canvas as well as in real life.

Bella. I, haughty? . . . How little you know me, Mr. Preston. I often feel that fortune has played me a scurvy trick. I ought to have been some poor girl, forced to earn her own living and proud to do so . . .

Hugh. Like your little friend, Miss Cameron.

Bella. (Hiding a smile.) Yes . . . precisely. Then I might really have been loved for myself—as she will, dear heart! I should have made an excellent poor man's wife, struggling on . . . What does one struggle on?—six thousand—four thousand a year?

Hugh. One might struggle on less.

Bella. I can fancy myself cooking a dinner . . . on a chafing dish. That sounds nice, does it not?

Hugh. Not very substantial, I should say—but nice, certainly.

Bella. And standing at the cottage door, looking out for the returning bread-winner.

Hugh. How touching! What would the bread-winner be like? Might he carry a paint-box on his back?

Bella. That depends. There are paint-boxes and paint-boxes.

Hugh. If he were to be hailed as the modern Van Dyck, for instance? . . . (Aside.) But isn't this love-making? . . . And my protestations to Sir Mervyn? . . .

Bella. Have you heard of such a man? I have not.

Hugh. But you may, in time.

Bella. Waiting is but wearisome work. Don't you think so?

Hugh. There are prizes one could wait for . . . indefinitely.

Bella. Until middle-age, for instance? An old maid led to the altar by an old bachelor.

Hugh. Such things have been. They are more truly romantic than many a hasty marriage.

Bella. Poor Peggie! What would she say to such a solution?

Hugh. We should not consult her.

Bella. (Haughtily.) We? . . . We have been making mere suppositions, have we not?

Hugh. Of course . . . certainly. You have lost the position, Miss Stewart. Now, the head is held too high. (A pause.)

Bella. May I look upon you as a real friend, Mr. Preston?

Hugh. As the truest and most devoted of friends.

Bella. Then, in all sincerity, tell me what you think of Sir Mervyn Woodruff.

Hugh. He is an honest gentleman, trusty and loyal.

Bella. You like him?

Hugh. Very much.

Bella. If you had a sister, would you willingly give her to him?

Hugh. With all my heart.

Bella. Especially if he said: "I love this woman as I could never love another. I think of nothing but her. I dream of nothing but her. She is the life of my life . . ."

Hugh. (Starting up.) By Jove—you were listening!

Bella. That is . . . I heard. It is not the same thing.

Hugh. And, just for the fun of it, you encouraged me almost to propose to you . . . almost, not quite . . . in spite of my promises!

Bella. You see, American girls flirt as ducks swim; it's in the blood and they can't help it. But . . . it does not amount to anything!

Hugh. Ah! Miss Stewart—that is not quite fair.

Bella. No, it is not. And I beg your pardon. Let's be friends, real friends. Here's my hand on it.

SCENE IV.

The same. Peggie rushes in madly, then stops short.

Peg. Well . . . I never! No wonder poor Sir Mervyn was wandering about the garden looking so forlorn!

Bella. It is extraordinary, Peggie, that you should always burst on people when you are least wanted. Mr. Preston and I were just agreeing about Sir Mervyn's good qualities.

Peg. In his place I should prefer disagreement, then!

Hugh. You did not rush upstairs, two steps at a time, merely to scold us, did you, Miss Peggie?

Peg. (Excitedly.) Not I! I've got lots of news. We are going to have fine doings long before we expected them. Aunt Jemima and all her tribe have plumped down upon us, with twenty trunks, maids and all the rest of it. They're wild to see the pic-

tures. The gallery, somehow, has been written up in the papers, and Mr. Stewart's "ancestors" are making the rounds of the States. Such a fine fuss! Father's just furious, and he's coming up. Only I ran ahead. It serves sometimes to be only fourteen. Now—what are we going to do?

Bella. (Irritated.) We shall be the laughing stock of the two worlds!

Hugh. Why? Nothing is changed that I know of. Most of the begrimed pictures are in their places. Other Americans have hunted up their forbears, why should not Mr. Stewart do so as well as another? His genealogical tree is illustrated, that's all—and as well illustrated as Holbein and the others have been able to do it . . . by proxy.

Bella. You, now, are making fun of us, too, Mr. Preston, and I am the first to acknowledge that we richly deserve it. But it is not very kind of you—you on whom I looked as a friend.

Hugh. Pardon me, Miss Stewart. I assure you that if I could serve you, I would do it with all my heart.

Peg. Here's father. I hear him puff—almost as much as Mother Dumpton.

SCENE V.

The same. Mr. Amos Stewart.

Mr. S. Confound it all! I wish I had never caused my ancestors to be resuscitated. Jemima has always

been jealous of us and has a viper's tongue. What can you suggest, Mr. Preston? Jemima must not see you.

Hugh. Why not, Mr. Stewart? Your family portraits were damaged—so many centuries, you know . . . and you have employed an artist to touch them up a bit. Finding that he had . . . let us say, some talent, you have commissioned him to paint yourself and your eldest daughter. What could be simpler? If I understand aright, this lady is your sister. She will naturally share in the family glory. Be sure that she will believe in the ancestors before a month is over—and swear by them all.

Mr. S. And, after all—why should it not all be true? One always has ancestors. The only difficulty is to find them.

Hugh. (Gently.) And what cannot American gold help to discover?

Peg. Why didn't you put the bricklayer in the series? He would have done as well as your Norman butchers and murderers. He would have represented those fine democratic principles of which we so like to prate.

Mr. S. Leave the bricklayer alone, my little girl. He's very well where he is, and doesn't at all ask to be resuscitated. Now, Preston, what are we going to do with this fine lady? She will fill up a space very well, and does honor to the family. But doesn't she seem very fresh for her period?

Hugh. We'll soon give her a sixteenth century complexion. A little thick varnish will do the business. Luckily, the paint is dry. I scarcely touched the

portrait this morning. See . . . (Takes a big brush and varnishes the picture.)

Mr. S. Wonderful! What a clever fellow you are, Preston. When I present you to Jemima, I'll do some booming. She has half a dozen daughters, and will order their portraits if she thinks you're celebrated. Whose pupil did you say you were? Van Dyck's, if I mistake not.

Hugh. In one sense—yes. I studied his portraits. Only he was not kind enough to come from the other world to give me lessons.

Mr. S. Never mind that. Jemima would never know the difference. Now, come along and put this in its frame before the whole tribe bursts upon us. Family cusses are the worst cusses in the world . . . one can't get rid of them. Come! (Hurries Hugh out. Bella follows. At the door they meet Ruth Cameron in her Puritan dress.)

Hugh. Pray, Miss Cameron, wait for me a few minutes. I merely have to hang this dainty lady.

Ruth. I thought your duty was to resuscitate people, not to hang them! (Exit Mr. Stewart, Hugh Preston and Bella.)

SCENE VI.

Ruth Cameron, Peggie.

Ruth. The whole place seems in a turmoil. What has happened?

Peg. An invasion of relatives—and that before the

ancestors, sufficiently begrimed, had been set up to look their best in the dusky gallery. Mr. Preston has chosen the darkest nooks for his masterpieces and the sets of armor stand up like so many crusaders, just where the light made them glitter. I say . . . it all looks very well and right, somehow. I wonder if they weren't really our ancestors?

Ruth. You will end by believing in them, Peggie—with all the others. It spreads like an epidemic.

Peg. You have no such small vanities, have you, Miss Ruth?

Ruth. Oh! We, in our family, are quite satisfied to reach back to lusty farmers of the colonial times. You know . . . for a governess . . .

Peg. Isn't that a lark, though! He really believes that you are one, or at least some sort of poor relation.

Ruth. And I feel quite guilty on the subject. It's all your fault, my little Peggie, and mine, too, for not contradicting the story at once. Somehow, I scarcely knew how to do it.

Peg. And then, like Bella—you wanted to be loved . . . for yourself.

Ruth. Ah! . . . loved? Mr. Preston talks to me, willingly enough—but he looks especially at Bella.

Peg. Bella's got to marry Sir Mervyn . . . she's just got to . . . so that she may invite me to her place in Devonshire. It's her bounden duty, and you know it is. Here comes your painter. I must be in the gallery when Aunt Jemima and all the cousins invade it. I wouldn't miss the fun for a quarter! (Rushes out.)

SCENE VII.

Hugh Preston, Ruth Cameron.

Hugh. A thousand pardons, Miss Cameron. I think we may snatch some sort of a sitting before luncheon, for Mr. Stewart will keep his relatives away from this ancestor factory, or I should be much astonished. Will you kindly take the position? That's right: hands folded on lap, head a little on one side—so.

Ruth. So you hope to finish this picture to-day?

Hugh. Hope? . . . fear would be the better word. I scarcely know how to tell you, Miss Cameron, what these sittings have been to me: they have revealed you to me as you are, really, not as you appear to others.

Ruth. And what is my real self, according to you?

Hugh. A woman, infinitely tender, compassionate to others—perhaps because she, herself, has suffered . . .

Ruth. Yet I assure you that I have nothing to complain of so far. Go on. You quite interest me.

Hugh. No—of course—you would never complain. You are as courageous as you are gentle.

Ruth. My courage has scarcely been put to the test.

But I trust that, should an occasion present itself, I should not prove a coward.

Hugh. And do you look upon your position as not trying, as not demanding peculiar dignity and real courage? I, too, have been thrown, by circumstances, with people much richer than myself. I know all the petty annoyances, humiliations even, which the disproportion of fortune inevitably brings about. This it is, Miss Ruth, which first drew me to you, made me study you . . . convinced me that if I left this place without telling you of my deep, my sincere feelings, I should be throwing away the one great happiness of my life.

Ruth. What would Bella say were she to hear you?

Hugh. She would say that I had chosen rightly—that I could nowhere find a lovelier, sweeter wife than her little friend—if only her little friend would consent to put her hand in mine—so!

Ruth. (Drawing away her hand.) Is it part of your profession to make love to your sitters, Mr. Preston? If so, the woman you finally marry would scarcely feel very sure of your affection.

Hugh. We seek to give a pleased expression to the faces we study, that is true. But that is scarcely making love, is it?

Ruth. Let us ask Arabella.

Hugh. Miss Stewart is, if I mistake not, at this moment consoling Sir Mervyn for his temporary disfigurement. I am to be asked to the wedding.

Ruth. And your heart is not broken? It is true that it has surely been often mended, like precious china.

Hugh. It is so little broken, Miss Cameron, that not

half an hour ago I urged this most desirable marriage first upon one, then upon the other.

Ruth. (With a pleased smile.) Really? . . . And since Peggie gives her consent, I suppose we may listen for the wedding bells.

Hugh. (Going up to her.) Will you do me the justice to believe that, for once, I can be serious, and very serious?

Ruth. I believe it, Mr. Preston.

Hugh. Then believe also that, from the first, I have thought of you, and tried to persuade myself that I might perhaps dare to woo you. Only, let me show myself as I really am: a poor painter, with a little talent—not over-much—and, so far, no reputation. It is therefore but a precarious life that I can offer you, with ups and downs—more downs than ups, I fear. But you are brave, and I am resolved to do my very best not to test your courage too far. I have faith in my future, if only you will help me to keep up that faith—and what an incentive I should then have!

Ruth. How could you think of me, by the side of Arabella?

Hugh. I admired Miss Stewart; but I loved you, that is all the difference.

Ruth. And you would take upon yourself the burden of a poor wife?

Hugh. Most gladly—most proudly.

Ruth. Then here is the hand I drew back just now.
(He kisses the hand.)

SCENE VIII.

The same. Peggie bounds in.

Peg. Well. Just now it was Bella—now it's you, Miss Ruth! I, for one, will never marry a painter. Paint seems to go to the head and makes universal lovers of those who use it.

Hugh. Pray observe the difference, Miss Peggie. I shook hands with your sister, to congratulate her upon her choice; but I kiss the hand of your governess—because she gives it to me to keep—always.

Peg. (Bursting with laughter.) My governess . . . and all that because of those horrid French verbs she insisted on teaching me. I think that joke has lasted long enough, don't you, Miss Ruth?

Ruth. Too long.

Peg. Did you never see the name of father's firm: Stewart and Cameron? Mr. Cameron is father's partner. It isn't likely that his daughter would go governessing, now is it?

Hugh. Oh! Ruth, you have deceived me!

Ruth. Forgive me, Hugh. It will be the last time. It all came from a misunderstanding. Bella and Peggie urged me not to undeceive you at once. . . . I am ashamed to say . . . that I was glad to profit by the mistake. Like Bella, I wanted to be loved for myself.

SCENE IX.

The same. Mr. Stewart, Arabella and Sir Mervyn Woodruff.

Mr. S. (Radiant.) It all turned out splendidly. Jemima was too curious about the gallery even to wait for the piling on of her false hair, and I've just left her in awed contemplation of . . . our ancestors. She's prouder of them than I am, and believes in them more firmly than in her catechism. She asked me if she could find a history of England in the library. I'm sure I don't know. If she is shaky on the subject, I am more so. The newspapers are enough for me, in the reading line.

Sir M. Question me. I can give you some points. What's the use of having an English son-in-law, if you can't pump him?

Mr. S. So—so, an English son-in-law? Why, Arabella, you assured me that you would marry none but an American. . . .

Bella. Since we are descended from so many noble English and Scottish heroes, father, it seems somehow natural to return to our original stock.

Mr. S. Preston—you have done your work too well. I did not bargain for this result.

Sir M. Am I not of sufficiently good birth, Mr. Stewart, to aspire to your daughter's hand? It is true that we were only knighted at Azincourt.

Bella. Father . . . we care for each other . . . very much.

Mr. S. That's all right, then. Shake hands, my dear fellow—and when in your turn, you have a daughter, I hope she will marry a good American.

Ruth. As to me, Mr. Stewart, not boasting of any noble ancestors, I am going to marry an American. Allow me to present him to you as a future great artist, Mr. Hugh Preston.

Mr. S. The pupil of Van Dyck! Well, young man, for a maker of ancestors you have not lost your time. You probably knew what you were about when you made love . . .

Ruth. (Interrupting him.) . . . to one whom he took to be Peggie's governess.

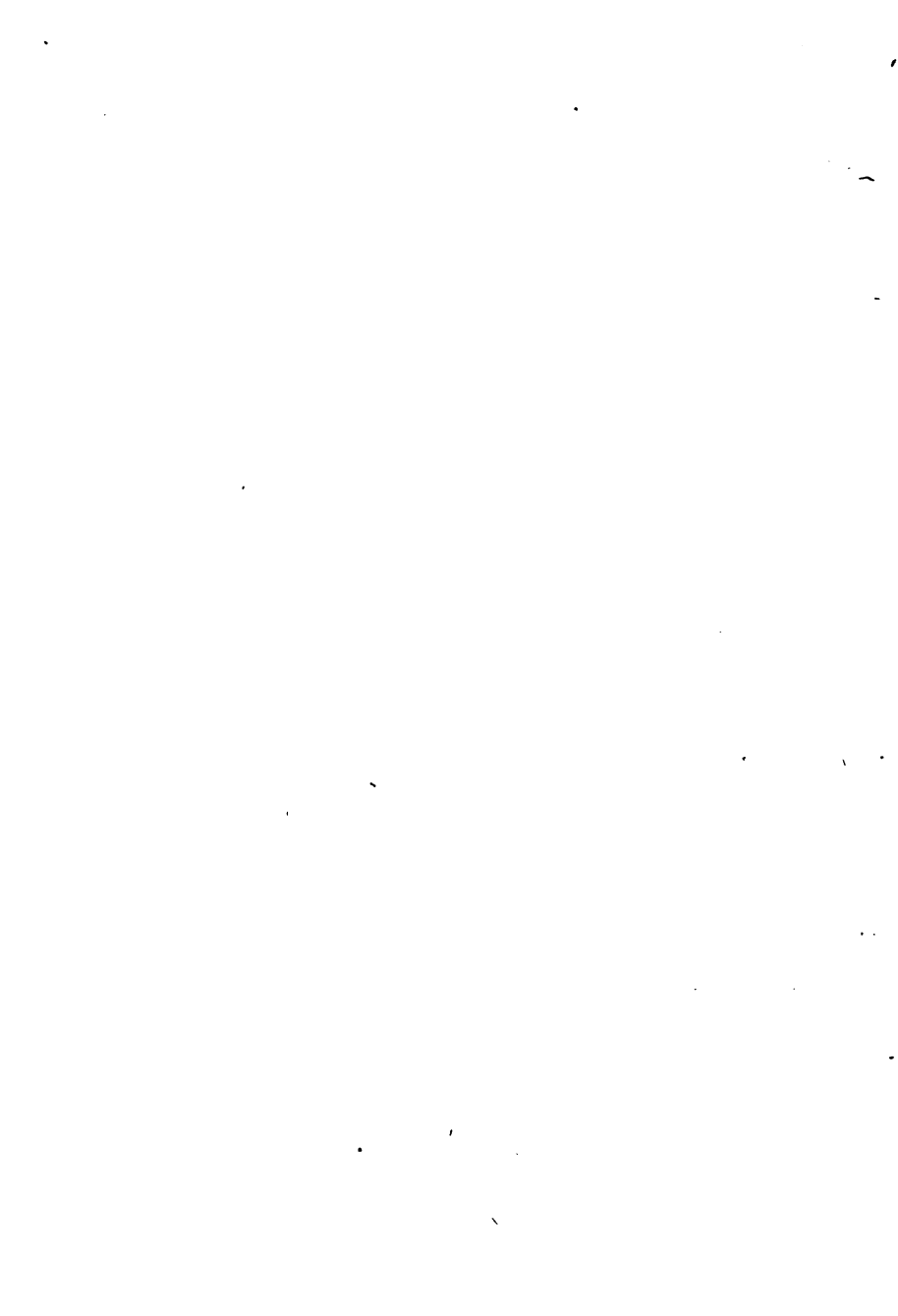
Hugh. And whom I should have married as such, most joyfully.

Peg. Hurrah! A double wedding. . . . When are you going to invite me to your castle, Bella?

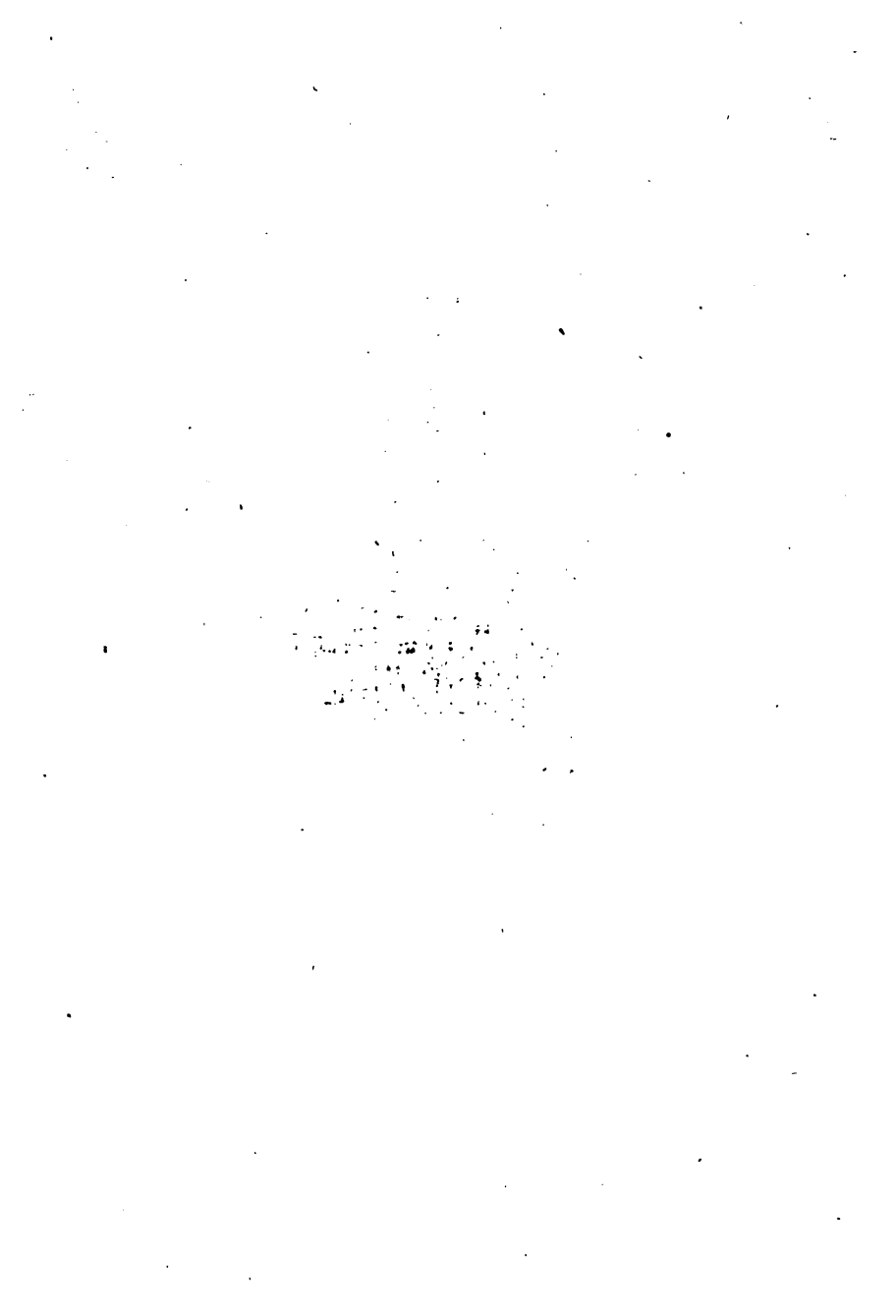










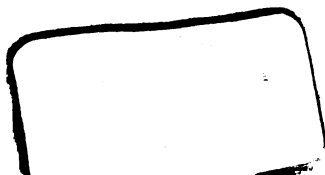




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